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Feelings, Women and Work in the Long 1950s

Claire Langhamer

Abstract

The emotional and occupational cultures of Britain underwent significant shifts during the long 1950s. This article explores the intersection between the two, using a range of social survey material – including Mass Observation sources - to explore feelings about paid work, the impact of paid employment on emotional well-being, and the management of feelings in the workplace. It article suggests that women workers were consistently constructed as both inherently emotional, and therefore unsuited for the higher occupational ranks, and as talented emotional workers able to perform unremunerated emotional labour. Whilst paid employment has often been presented as the antidote to domestic discontent, experiential evidence suggests that it also often involved the migration of private emotion work into the public domain.

Biography

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Introduction

In the autumn of 1947, Mass Observation asked a married tax inspector 'How do you feel about your job at present?' His response reflected both a historically specific style of writing emotions, and a stereotypically masculine attitude towards the subject. 'I feel that it is better not to feel about work but simply to do the task immediately before me to the best of my ability. If I were to allow myself to think about my job I fancy I should feel thoroughly disheartened.'¹ This conception of paid employment as an emotion-free space - whether as protection from personal demons, or as an essential precondition for business efficiency - unravelled in the years that followed the Second World War. An emotional revolution that privileged the management of children's feelings, and encouraged heightened emotional investment in marital relationships, also impacted upon the everyday experience of doing a job. Nowhere was this trend more apparent than in attitudes towards, and experiences of, women employees. In this article I will argue that the female worker - a significant figure within the post-war labour market - was consistently constructed as both inherently emotional and therefore ill-equipped for career advancement, and as talented emotional labourer, able to shoulder burdens that were not always remunerated.

Post-war women were not, of course, the only people in history whose employment - as well as domestic life - has encompassed an emotional dimension. Lucy Delap, Judy Giles, Alison Light, Caroline Steedman and Selina Todd have all, for example, illuminated the emotional work of domestic service.² The emotional impact of unemployment on individual lives has also been explored.³ What was distinctive about the long 1950s, was that emotion - and women's management of other people's emotion in particular - came to matter a great deal within public as well as private life. As Matthew Thomson has recently observed, the post-war settlement was founded upon 'powerful structures of feeling.'⁴ In particular, the mother-child relationship was heralded as the bedrock upon which the health of the nation was to be built; a fetishisation of emotional security stemming directly from the experience of war. Relationships between spouses were also deemed crucial to the process of national reconstruction. The feelings of returning servicemen needed particularly careful management and this was a task for which their wives were to be primarily responsible.⁵

However, rebuilding a nation necessitated looking beyond the family. Emotion was just as valuable a tool for inculcating gendered citizenship in peacetime, as it had been during the Second World War. The war effort had, of course, demanded carefully calibrated emotional mobilisation. Feelings of love, hatred and anger were deployed both in the service of patriotism and to give individual meaning to notions of national duty. And yet it was emotional restraint and resilience that were judged to have underpinned victory, even if fear had also quietly haunted civilian lives.⁶ The admonishment to 'keep smiling through, just like you always do', reinforced the importance of emotional fortitude in the face of adversity.⁷ The stoicism of women and the emotional support they provided for the men in their lives was crafted as a form of war-work: this was the scaffolding upon which male achievement in battle might depend.⁸

The use of emotion in peacetime therefore built on an established repertoire of public feeling. Responding to a post-war industrial labour shortage, as well as expanding

employment opportunities in the emergent welfare state, the British government deployed emotion in a number of female-focused recruitment campaigns.⁹ Appeals were made through newspapers, radio, posters and the cinema, with women aged between thirty-five and fifty a particular target: 'Many of you have your own household problems but the country is up against it.'¹⁰ Hospital orderlies were recruited with the request to 'Be an angel – come and help', potential teachers were told 'Look - the children need you – it's a worthwhile job' and in the particularly pointed film, *Women Must Work*, female viewers were informed that, 'If you can manage to come back to work you'll be helping the country, making new friends and putting more money in your bag.'¹¹ Emotion featured in these campaigns in multiple ways: a distinctive emotional register was deployed to persuade female worker-citizens into paid work; the emotional benefit of work to individual women was emphasised; and the work itself was often categorised as having a significant emotional dimension which women were particularly well-equipped to perform. Emotion was a valuable commodity. It was both central to the shaping of the female self in the public world and a driver of labour market mobility. Neither equal pay, nor renewed financial support for day nurseries, were part of the deal.¹² Nor was the identity of 'worker' to be more than ancillary status for anyone other than those migrant women explicitly constructed as workers rather than as wives and mothers.¹³

Nonetheless a dramatic qualitative and quantitative shift in the nature of female labour market participation was one of the defining features of the second half of the British twentieth century. By 1971 half of all married women of working age were in paid employment, a shift that has been characterised as 'the social revolution of our time.'¹⁴ The expansion of married women's part-time employment, alongside improved education and employment opportunities for young single women, transformed understandings of women's capacity and reshaped domestic life even before the advent of the Women's Liberation Movement. Throughout the 1950s the implication of shifting work patterns for women, families and occupational hierarchies was much discussed, as the possibility that the ordinary married woman might be expected to perform two complementary roles gained ground.¹⁵ The health of children, husbands, nation and (more rarely) women themselves, was held to rest on the correct deployment of female labour outside the home. Too little and the economy would falter; too much and society would suffer. Feelings loomed large in this discussion. Women's post-war employment was constructed, and experienced, through the lens of powerful emotions such as guilt and anxiety about motherhood. Feelings about paid employment increasingly informed models of reflexive selfhood and identity. The emotional impact of work could frame the life experiences of other family members as well as impacting upon personal health and well-being. Feelings at work became a matter for self-regulation whilst the management of other people's feelings could be a significant, though often hidden, aspect of everyday work.

This article sits at the intersection between the history of emotion and the history of women's employment. In his recent history of post-war *Working Lives*, Arthur McIvor asserts that 'whether negative or positive, or the many hues of grey between, what is evident is that work was a deeply emotional experience.'¹⁶ And yet while historians have developed new concepts for understanding emotions in the past such as emotionology, emotional navigation, emotional regimes and emotional management, there has been little attempt, as yet, to use emotion as a category of analysis within the history of work in the late modern epoch. In part this reflects the

dominance of cultural and intellectual approaches to the history of emotion. It also, perhaps, speaks to a tendency to focus on single emotions in isolation rather than on feeling as a broad category or on multiple emotions simultaneously.¹⁷ And yet historians offer rich conceptual resources for the study of feelings at work. The notion of 'emotional communities', defined by Barbara Rosenwein as 'groups in which people adhere to the same norms of expression and value – or devalue – the same or related emotions' has enormous, if problematic, potential for thinking about the dominance of different occupational cultures in different temporal contexts.¹⁸ Benno Gammerl's suggestion that distinct spatial settings demand distinct emotional repertoires – 'how specific emotions like grief, happiness or affection are generated, handled and expressed depends to a large degree on where they occur' – helps us to think about employment-based 'emotional styles'.¹⁹ Thinking specifically about women's work and emotion helps us to unpick contemporaneous understandings of public and private space and to trace the points where the apparently private bled into the public and where the ostensibly public bled into the private. Thinking more broadly about feelings at work allows us to explore the ways in which social relations underpin relations of production: to take a category of cultural history and engage with it in social and economic terms.

If historians of twentieth-century Britain have only occasionally explored feelings at work, emotion-focused studies within the sociology of work abound. These are greatly indebted to the seminal work of Arlie Russell Hochschild whose book, *The Managed Heart*, conceptualised the relationship between work and feeling in very precise ways.²⁰ For Hochschild, emotional labour was both embodied – 'the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display' – and had exchange value – 'emotional labour is sold for a wage.'²¹ Writing in 1983 she located emotional labour in employment that involved contact with members of the public and, crucially, responsibility for their emotional state. It was also characterised by emotional controls imposed from above.²² Hochschild developed the application of her term through work on airline cabin crew, and a smaller study of debt collectors, consistently drawing a distinction between the performance of emotional labour and the emotional burdens that might be placed on a worker as part of the everyday experience of work. It was the former that was the focus of Hochschild's research.

In this article I am interested in emotional labour and burden. Most importantly, I explore the interplay between them at a moment when the emotional and occupational culture of Britain was shifting significantly. Indeed the long 1950s – the period immediately following the Second World War – is a particularly apt context within which to explore the emotional history of work. As Stephen Brooke points out in an important study of working class identity, 'more complicated and less certain gender identities emerged at the work-place and in the home during this period.'²³ This was a moment when the proper place of emotion and of subjectivity within public life was being actively assessed; when the boundary between public and private seemed to be in flux and when the 'psychologisation of experience' posited new ways of storying working, as well as intimate, lives.²⁴ A 1959 advert for the Women's Royal Army Corps demonstrates the shift well. 'Her job is vital – and she knows it! She's an individual. Free to express her personality, yet she's part of a team, doing important work...'²⁵ As we will see, she was also free to carry some of the gendered emotional burdens of domestic life into the world of paid employment.

Mass Observation and Feeling

This article draws on a range of cultural and experiential sources to examine feelings at work in four different but overlapping ways. I map contemporaneous feelings about the principle of female employment; I examine individual feelings about actually doing a job; I explore the emotional benefits and burdens of managing work in everyday life; and I investigate the forms of emotional labour performed by women in the round of paid employment. The evidential base includes the findings of post-war experts who, whilst ostensibly describing shifts in women's employment patterns, actively constituted the subject of their research.²⁶ I also utilise writing generated by Mass Observation across the mid- to late-twentieth century.²⁷ In particular, I draw upon volunteer responses to the 1947 directive (a thematic open-ended questionnaire) on feelings about your job, and upon retrospective accounts of working lives collected by the Mass Observation Project (1981 – present). This life writing, which sits at the fold between the public and the private, constitutes another form of expertise. This is an expertise rooted in everyday life and within which the distinction between experience and representation is often blurred.

Those contributing to Mass Observation in the mid-century were routinely asked to record their feelings on a wide range of subjects. In 1947 alone the panellists were asked how they felt about gambling, the atom-bomb, charity, conscription, conscientious objectors, getting married, blindness and blind people, paper bound books, religion, rationing, local papers and the royal wedding. At the beginning of the year they had been asked 'How do you feel about 1947?' Their feelings about changing work experiences were solicited on a number of occasions and back in January 1944 they had been asked to consider 'the possibility of married women going out to work after the war'.²⁸ The 364 respondents to the 1947 directive were, then, well used to expressing their feelings on paper. Although some used 'feeling' as a proxy for thought or belief, most writers were clear that their response to these questions offered an emotional perspective.

The late twentieth century Mass Observation Project also provides routes into people's affective worlds, sometimes in collaboration with other researchers. Here, for example, I use responses generated in 1983 through a BBC2 sponsored directive.²⁹ The correspondents were asked to provide basic biographical details of their working lives and then to reflect on past, present and future. Panellists were encouraged to consider the impact of their parents' work on family life, to address questions of security and work-related anxiety, to recall their childhood ambitions and to elucidate their sense of the meaning and status of work more broadly. Fourteen years later Mass Observation distributed a closely related directive on the subject of 'Doing a Job'.³⁰ It again asked the volunteer writers to reflect on work over their lifetime, 'Can you remember what you wanted to be when you grew up? How does the way things have turned out fit with your childhood hopes? What jobs did your parents have? How does what you do compare with their work?' A number of contributors to this directive had previously replied to the 1983 directive and the responses of individuals across time are strikingly similar despite the very different social, economic, political and biographical context within which their responses were composed. Whilst the use of Mass Observation material is not unproblematic - the responses used here are memory texts solicited from a self-selected group of people - Mass Observation provides a

distinctive body of reflective material within which prescription and practice intersect and through which change over time can be both mapped and problematized.³¹ As we will see, Mass Observation's correspondents theorise, and historicise, their own emotional and working lives as they write about past, present and future selves.

Women's Employment in Post War Britain

The growth of married women's paid work provoked varying degrees of anxiety, particularly (although not only) where children were involved. Criticisms of working mothers were not solely the province of post-war psychoanalysis but the views of its key popularisers were clear. 'The absolute need of infants and toddlers for the continuous care of their mothers will be borne in upon all who read this book', asserted Dr John Bowlby in his much read manual *Child Care and the Growth of Love*.³² Competing attitudes towards woman's societal role were sharply delineated in debates concerning her occupational capabilities and emotional status. Social scientists Alva Myrdal and Viola Klein - enthusiastic proponents of the 'two role' model - conceded that women 'do not yet feel 'at home' in both worlds' [my emphasis].³³ In a study of *Wives Who Went to College* published in 1957 Judith Hubback described the dilemmas faced by relatively privileged women:

The educated wife of today has to steer a careful course: she must avoid both the rocks of aggressive insistence on her status and also the mud-flats of self deprecation. She must be both feminine and masculine, but not lean too far one way or the other. She must try to combine in herself some at least of the attitudes which were once believed to be found only in men, with a liberal allowance of the qualities that marriage and motherhood engender. In a predominantly masculine world she must restate feminine values and she must insist on the importance of human relationships. Unless her husband agrees with her wholeheartedly, these combinations and new orientations will be very difficult to achieve. With his love, his trust and his help she will do great things.³⁴

Within this reading emotional self-management apparently underpinned fulfilling and effective female citizenship. A supportive and loving husband was important too, suggesting a carefully circumscribed emotional role for men within the post-war companionate marriage.

And yet, notwithstanding these apparent challenges, married women - with or without children and across social classes - increasingly did engage in paid labour. And they drove an expansion of the part-time sector as they did so, assisted by the 1950 Factories (Evening Employment) Order which relaxed restrictions on female shift work facilitating an early evening - family duties friendly - 'twilight shift'.³⁵ As Dolly Smith Wilson has demonstrated, these shifts did not necessarily mean that women's labour was accorded greater societal value, or that the overarching male breadwinner model was immediately destabilised.³⁶ Yet individual female workers proved adept at moulding their personal models of good womanhood to suit everyday circumstance. Some actively rejected discourses of guilt. 'My girls are perfectly all right. My mother lives nearby and takes care of the children' one factory supervisor and mother of two girls told Ferdinand Zweig. 'I like my independence.'³⁷ Others emphasised the

impact of women's employment upon the financial well-being of the family. As one mother of three put it:

I don't care what people say, but I like this modern idea that all women should work; it's a change for them and they don't have to slave away at home all day, like I do. And it is better for the children as well. My Johnny often asks me to give him a few pennies for the pictures like his friend from next door gets, but I can't give him anything. I have no money.³⁸

Husbands adapted their views too, often persuaded by economic arguments. 'My husband does not like it; he does not want me to go out to work, because men like to be our masters, don't they?' a nineteen year old box factory worker with a baby confided. Zweig added, 'she thinks that she will manage to persuade him to let her go out, because the money will come in useful for holidays, clothes etc.'³⁹ When Viola Klein researched the experiences of Working Wives in conjunction with Mass Observation in 1957 she found that the husbands of working women were generally supportive – although not without qualification. Some had strong views. 'Quite definitely, I do approve', declared a fifty four-year-old clerk, 'Women who do not go out to work are narrow minded, stodgy, uninteresting, miserable. Women who do are intelligent, can talk more interestingly, are more equal. No, a man any man, who disagrees with his wife's work is jealous in case she meets someone else.'⁴⁰

If married women represented their paid employment as a method of enhancing family life, single women were encouraged to see work as an emotional substitute for husband and child. The slightly incredulous title of Leonora Eyles self help book – *Unmarried but Happy* – reflected post-war attitudes towards singleness well. Eyles encouraged those without ties to pursue 'sublimation through work'; to find an occupation through which they could channel their thwarted feminine aptitudes towards the public good.⁴¹ Those unable to pursue 'the reproductive impulse' might usefully immerse themselves in 'the civilised instinct to make the 'good life' for the community and for coming generations.'⁴² Looking after children, the sick and the elderly topped Eyles' list of preferred sublimating options. Positions of authority should be considered only with extreme caution as the absence of spousal support might prove catastrophic: 'Unlike the married woman or the married man, she has nobody at home to sympathise, to bolster her up; fighting a battle in her work-life she may become embittered and tough. Far better to make herself the sort of person who is liked, whom people wish to co-operate with.'⁴³ For Eyles, the emotional burdens of modern work necessitated emotional support at home, from husbands as well as wives. Her sense of the emotional vulnerability of the single woman also reflected a creeping disdain for those who chose not to partner up in a period of near universal marriage.

Feelings at Work

Thus far I have argued that emotion was heavily implicated in debates about women's paid employment in postwar Britain. The relationship between feeling and work was no less complicated within the home than it was outside of it. When Mass Observation asked its panelists to write about their jobs in October 1947 the responses offered by women reflected divergent experience and definitional complexity. They

also reflected confusion about where emotional investment should properly be directed. 'My job is Housewife. Do I speak about that as though I go out to business?' asked one woman adding that 'after 35 years of doing and running and helping to run a home I realize I don't like housework.'⁴⁴ The challenges faced by those working in the home, in a period when everyday items were in short supply, permeate these answers.⁴⁵ 'If you mean the job of housewife, well I guess anyone is welcome to it at the present time. It's just one long line up for worry and work' observed a former office worker.⁴⁶ A thirty two-year old mother admitted that 'I do get very fed up sometimes and long to go out to work (though when I did I longed to give it up and be a housewife!)'.⁴⁷ Housewifery was not necessarily endowed with more emotional content than work outside the home: 'A housewife can have no 'feelings' on her job', wrote one twenty seven-year-old, 'she just gets on with it as quickly as possible, anticipating the hour or two's peace in an evening.'⁴⁸

Nonetheless the impact of government campaigns to encourage active female citizenship was evident in the reported feelings of both self-defined housewives and paid employees about their jobs. A university research assistant admitted to loving her job but worried about its value:

There are big joys and there are heartbreaks in research but having once realized that that is part and parcel of the work, I am very happy in my work. I have splendid collaborators and friends and I am free with regard to hours. I like it so much it is worth the small salary that goes with it. Also I am looking forward to getting a PhD, which means much to me. In certain moments of sanity I feel useless and unproductive, but there is the other aspect that figures and facts on paper have their value and are useful in production, even if indirectly. (I am doing research on leather manufacture).⁴⁹

Fear of letting the nation down framed the responses of many. Even a woman involved in cancer research worried about the perceived value of her contribution: 'I wish the Government could devise some means, in their production drive, of giving people like me the feeling that we (meaning the non-producers) are 'in it together' with the producers.'⁵⁰ Those working predominantly within the home were not immune to self-doubt. 'I feel very guilty about the lack of opportunity for social service of some kind; more so as every available person is needed at full strength to pull us out of post war difficulties', admitted a woman whose job consisted 'merely in running a home in 4 acres, growing vegetables and rhubarb and geese and keeping pace with a semi-invalid husband who is a major allergic.'⁵¹

The retrospective accounts collected by Mass Observation in 1983 are refracted through the shifting emotional frameworks of subsequent years and reflect processes of life review and composure.⁵² In fact their retrospective nature facilitates a particular kind of perspective on the emotional burdens and rewards of managing work in everyday life. 'Being a divorcee with two young children and hardly ever receiving any money from my husband, I was forced to take almost any job that came along', recalled one woman.⁵³ Her narrative reflects both the emotional and the practical dilemmas faced by working mothers and the inescapable way in which the private bled into the public:

I tried working full-time but sometimes one of the children fell ill and I had to

leave. This happened several times. Or, I would receive alarming 'phone calls from a worried elder child to say that little brother had not arrived home from school and what should she do? I was a nervous wreck by the time I reached home to find him safe and sound.⁵⁴

Others wrote as the children of 1950s' employed mothers: 'I earned more than I had ever done and for the first time since my father had died in 1934 I was able to keep my mum at home instead of her doing 3 jobs just to keep food on the table' wrote one of her 'wonderful' job in public transport, 'and I was very proud of this achievement.'⁵⁵

As we have already seen, 1950s commentators warned against the emotional damage that working mothers might do to their children - and by extension to society. The importance of full time motherhood for the psychological development of the child formed the cornerstone of the advice offered by Donald Winnicott on BBC radio.⁵⁶ And yet in retrospective accounts it is just as often the work of the father that is identified as the determinant of domestic emotional culture and a burden on other family members.⁵⁷ 'His work was regularly interrupted by spells in bed with a duodenal ulcer' recalled one daughter.⁵⁸ 'He never spoke about this or theorized as to what was the cause of the illness though the doctor talked a lot about 'bottling up emotion' and being 'over-conscientious'. (This was repeated by mother).' Shift work had a distinct impact upon the rhythms of family life and could be a significant disruption to the emotional landscape of home, as a woman recalled of her 1950s' upbringing:

My parents' work often affected the family life quite strongly. My father often worked shifts and quite often night work so life never really had a strict routine. When I was older my mother also went out to work. She always worked in the catering business so quite often the hours were un-social. In fact in my father's mid years he had a nervous breakdown and this was attributed to the fact that he worked irregular shifts. I can't remember my parents really enjoying their work, my father was a manual worker although he didn't really seem suited to it, being a gentle person. My father worked as a necessity, constantly worried about money.⁵⁹

Here the apparent disjuncture between the emotional and physical culture of the father's workplace and his daughter's sense of his essential nature is striking.

The emotional imprint of a parent's work could be experienced in other ways too, notably in absence and in silence. The narrative of a woman born in 1941 began with the simple statement, 'My father worked'. She then explained that,

He would not allow my mother to do so and few of my school friends had mothers who worked unless they were teachers. My mother wanted to work because she was bored. I was an only child, we had a large house and paid help with its cleaning and it was rather isolated so it was natural that she should feel lonely. Mother was fond of saying: 'If I died no-one would know until they read it in the 'Echo' (The Liverpool Echo, the evening newspaper)...

...My father brought work home with him most evenings. His job was secure but, I gathered, highly stressful. He was often home later than expected and my mother worried so that as a child I couldn't settle until he was safely home. I was not allowed to 'bother' him until he had eaten once he came in. I was also not allowed to make a noise when he was working at home in the evening, preparing reports for meetings etc. Mother would sit quietly knitting or reading but I wanted to play records once I had finished my homework. It was more relaxing to be at school friends' homes.⁶⁰

For this writer, and others, the shadow cast by a father's working practices ensured that home was not an emotional haven. And yet her personal experience did not prevent her looking to other people's families for what she believed to be missing from her own. Her story also suggests that it was not just children who felt the impact of adult working lives.

Spouses were also affected by the nature of their partner's paid employment, his or her feelings about that employment and cultural expectations concerning their role in supporting that work. Some husbands felt challenged by shifting financial dynamics: 'I earn £4 17s. and my husband gives me the same' one woman told Zweig. 'What he could give me would not keep four of us in comparative comfort. I like my independence, although there is another aspect to it. My husband feels that I become too independent, that I don't need him.'⁶¹ Male resistance could take on more obstructive forms. Writing about her full-time shop job one woman recalled that 'My husband was on shift work at the time and one Saturday refused to stay awake to look after the children so I had to go down the road to the phone box to ring the shop and say I could not come in. On the Monday following I went in to work and was told to go and they gave me a week's wages in lieu of notice.'⁶²

Judith Hubback found that graduate wives of farmers, clergymen and doctors were more likely than most to be explicitly drawn into their husband's employment in a non-paid capacity.⁶³ 'Of course as far as being a companion to my husband and helping him in his work counts as my job, I think it's a splendid one and enjoy it more than anything' wrote one woman in 1947.⁶⁴ Wives were expected to offer more than just practical support. Writing under the headline 'How Few Wives Know what HE endures!' Daily Mail columnist Iris Ashley lectured her readers on the psychic burdens carried by their husbands:

If he is his own boss, all day long he has wondered about the fruits of his decisions. If he is not, then most days he will have had to deal tactfully with the man above him, reasonably with his equals, fairly with those below him; knowing all the time privately that somebody wants his job, or that if he could the man below him would leap over him to the coveted position as his superior.⁶⁵

It would help, she suggested 'if more wives understood the strain under which their menfolk live. If they would let them unwind a bit at home and always give them time to recover at the end of the day.' Some readers objected to her tone. Even psychiatrist Carl Jung got in on the act. Talking 'frankly' to journalist Frederick Sands, he pointed to the emotional trauma faced by men at work: '...women are unable to realise that in business their husbands are not the monarchs of all they survey. As often as not they

are underdogs who have to put up with a great deal – a bullying boss, for instance. And the best remedy for that is a woman's understanding.'⁶⁶ A male worker's emotional response to another emotional man thus became work for the wife at home.

Indeed as Mike Roper found in an oral history of post-war organization men, the proper role for a businessman's wife was that of emotional support and occasional hostess.⁶⁷ New products were sold on the grounds that they would assist wives in this mission. According to a 1959 advert, dandruff nearly prevented a Mrs J. L. of Enfield from seeing her husband receive a presentation watch. However the application of Loxene shampoo quickly solved the problem 'And at the presentation I felt so proud when I heard one of Ted's friends say what a smart wife he had – such marvellous hair.'⁶⁸ An advert for Gas seemed to imply that an improvised steak dinner for a husband's boss – presented within the right emotional environment - was a ticket to a posting in Rio.⁶⁹ The intersection of personal appearance and domestic skill was central to such representations but so too was the ability to create emotional tone. Within this context the female body acted as a proxy for emotion; a representation of spousal feeling within a public space. Within the home, as well as within the workplace, the capacity of women to regulate emotional culture, manage psychic problems and, crucially, to control their own feelings was so widely accepted that it rarely drew comment. The irony that highly sophisticated 'feelings-work' was being demanded of individuals simultaneously castigated as too emotional to succeed in the higher occupational echelons was not widely acknowledged.

Emotional Politics at Work

Contemporaneous notions of female suitability for particular occupations were rooted in the belief that women were possessed of innate 'emotional' qualities. This belief could lead to a blurring of the identities of wife, mother and worker within the home and within the workplace. An 'Aspro' aspirin advert in *Woman's Illustrated* featured a male worker sleeping at his desk: 'It's all nerves with you' observed a female colleague before advising him to take a tablet.⁷⁰ Aspro adverts for female customers assumed that they were capable of self-diagnosis, even as they acknowledged that 'Women's duties today are never-ending.'⁷¹

The employment opportunities most often presented to women emphasised a feminine duty of care whether to children, the sick and vulnerable or to their male co-workers and bosses. The mid-century decline in domestic service and concomitant rise of white-collar work has often been seen as a form of occupational modernisation. The office itself was a symbol of 'the modern' through the foregrounding of new forms of technology.⁷² By 1971 clerical work accounted for 27% of all jobs done by women; 38% of school leavers went into offices in 1961.⁷³ However, the work that women employees actually performed in offices was, as Rosemary Pringle has shown, often another form of personal service.⁷⁴ The emotional burdens more typically associated with home followed women into the workplace. In a *Daily Mirror* article entitled 'How to pick a perfect secretary', women were advised to 'Anticipate his every wish. But do not fuss over him. Be poised, unruffled, pleasant when the boss is in a bad mood. The personal secretary has to be a bit of a psychologist...she should do everything short of falling in love with him.'⁷⁵ In its 'what shall I be' series, *Woman*

and Home at least attempted to describe actual tasks, though the emotional labour involved is hardly any less striking:

She knows how to compose good letters, she is completely dependable, and possesses the qualities of discretion and absolute loyalty to her employer. She reminds him of appointments, shields him from unnecessary interruptions and receives callers. She makes all sorts of arrangements for him also – books, restaurant-tables, theatre tickets, hotel accommodation, train and plane reservations, and settles details for the holding of board meetings and conferences. And one of her most valuable assets is the instinctive ability to anticipate her employer's needs.⁷⁶

One *Mass Observer* rather caustically suggested that 'Girls hoping to marry the boss traditionally chose to be secretaries, whose work is like that of a wife. Do most of the work and make him look as if he's doing it.'⁷⁷

Nonetheless, in the life writing of those who actually worked as secretaries, the burden of emotional labour is clear, as is an underlying anger sublimated at the time but emerging over subsequent years. 'As secretary to the 'Captain Mainwaring' described in the first part of this directive, I found myself in the main firing line while he preserved his lovable importance in a distant office', wrote one woman born in 1931.

I had to lie and cover up for him, wangle little goodies and freebies for him, boost his importance generally. 'I demand loyalty' was one of his catch-phrases. It was my job to change his wife's book at the Times library and actually choose something suitable for her to read, to rush out and buy chicory when it came in at the greengrocers (this was 1950). If she telephoned I had to say he was in conference etc.⁷⁸

Secretarial work, in this account, included defending the boss's emotional capital, supporting his marriage as well as his career, and effectively 'training' his actual wife - even choosing which library books she should read. It is, perhaps, little wonder that Marjorie Proops felt the need to ask her readers 'Does the boss make you mad, girls?' in 1957.⁷⁹ Whilst paid employment has often been presented as the antidote to domestic discontent this evidence suggests that for some women, at least, it simply involved the migration of private emotion work into the public domain, creating yet another type of 'double burden'.

An assumption that women possessed an innate capacity for unremunerated emotional labour marked their experiences in other occupational sectors too. Even women police officers were perceived to be adept at performing emotional work: 'Some of the most moving scenes we ever witness are of very small children, who have been beaten and neglected by their parents clinging to the women police and beaming at them lovingly through their tears', observed the magistrate Sir Basil Henriques in 1950.⁸⁰ It seemed difficult for women to avoid being categorised as emotional labourers, but this status could also block career advancement. As Ferdynand Zweig saw it, women were qualified to support but rarely to lead:

Most women regard it as quite natural that they have to take a back seat and

eat humble pie. They do not aspire to higher positions, to better jobs and foremost ranks. That is what is often referred to by managers who say: "They show little ambition or keenness to get on", or "They regard themselves as helpmeets or assistants of men, not as competitors to their jobs." That is why they are so good as secretaries. A man might aspire to the position of the boss but a woman hardly ever. She regards herself as a supplement to him, not as his competitor.⁸¹

The better-paid and higher status roles in the professions, industry and science were, by way of contrast, constructed as beyond the capacity of the normal woman because they demanded a 'rational' - and thereby inherently masculine - approach. A study of women in industry conducted by Sear, Roberts and Brock asserted that 'Prejudice runs like a scarlet thread all through the pattern of this study: prejudice against putting women into positions of power.'⁸² Women are 'emotional and cannot deal with emergencies' they were informed by one male manager. In the early 1950s, Zweig found managers who doubted the maturity of their women employees and believed that they invested 'job relations with personal feelings'⁸³ 'They strike you as more childish. You can easily pull the wool over their eyes. If you approach them with a full string of figures they are lost' claimed one.⁸⁴ Within the post-war workplace the discursive separation of 'emotion' from its implied opposite 'reason' was mapped onto the workforce in explicitly gendered ways. It divided forms of work and it divided types of workers. Whilst some occupations were seen as particularly suited to woman's nature, their very suitability detracted from their status. Ultimately the assumption that the working woman was innately more emotional than the working man acted to limit opportunities. Nonetheless employers and co-workers increasingly came to demand emotion work from women employees as part of the ordinary working day, establishing a powerful - and lasting - model for women's behavior in the workplace.

Conclusion

The study of feelings at work raises questions about the gendered status of particular tasks, the prevalence of unrecognised and unremunerated work, and the occupational resources from which modern subjectivities are constructed. It also raises wider issues about the relative value of the feelings of emotional actors in a modern democracy. Published in 1941, but based on experiences prior to the war, H. E. Dale's book *The Higher Civil Service of Great Britain* outlined what he termed 'the doctrine of "feelings"':

...the importance of feelings varies in close correspondence with the importance of the person who feels. If the public interest requires that a junior clerk should be removed from his post, no regard need to be paid to his feelings; if it is the case of an Assistant Secretary, they must be carefully considered, within reason; if it is a Permanent Secretary, his feelings are a principal element in the situation, and only imperative public interest can override their requirements.⁸⁵

With the increased entry of married women into the workforce this 'doctrine of feelings' assumed an increasingly gendered dimension.⁸⁶ In the long 1950s those

charged with the most emotional labour were often those whose own feelings were the least highly regarded and who were held to be most prone to emotional disturbance.

The entry of married women into paid employment, in larger numbers than recorded hitherto, transformed the emotional culture of many workplaces. This was not because women were inherently 'more emotional' than men, rather that the ability to juggle home and work – and the public debate that surrounded this struggle – actively contributed to the re-shaping of the boundaries between home life and work life in modern Britain. Thinking about feelings at work offers new insights into occupational hierarchy, the value of different forms of labour and perhaps also ways of conceptualising the nature of labour and the labour process itself. Work with an overtly emotional dimension was perceived as particularly well suited to the aptitudes of women; women were therefore believed to be too emotional to perform higher status work – notably that which involved the management of other workers. It was widely expected that women workers would perform unremunerated emotional labour, and that wives would contribute both emotionally and practically to their husband's paid employment.

Analysis of the role of emotion in the mid-century also encourages us to think holistically about the relationship between people's working selves and their other selves; to consider how they moved between different emotional communities and to identify the cultural tools and personal resources they drew upon to do so. More broadly the study of employment and feeling allows us to see more vividly the extensive work that emotion actually did in mid-twentieth century Britain. Emotion played a powerful role within public as well as private lives, actively re-drawing the historically contingent relationship between the two spheres. Moreover, concepts of public and private were mobilised to talk about the spatial, economic and gendered dimensions of emotion. Within debates about work in the long 1950s 'private' feeling underpinned 'public' practice: in fact the spatial distinction between the two was increasingly blurred. This shift helped to establish cultures of workplace behaviour, and gendered senses of the employed self, which continue to resonate into the twenty first century.

¹ Mass Observation asked its panel of volunteer writers 'How do you feel about your job at present?' Mass Observation Archive, (hereafter, MOA), directive for October/ November 1947. DR 3811, Married man with children.

² Lucy Delap (2011), *Knowing Their Place: domestic service in twentieth-century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press); Alison Light (2008), *Mrs Woolf and the Servants* (London: Penguin); Judy Giles (2004), *The Parlour and the Suburb: domestic identities, class, femininity and modernity* (Oxford: Berg); Carolyn Steedman (2009), *Labours Lost: Domestic Service and the Making of Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press); Selina Todd (2009), 'Domestic Service and Class Relations in Britain 1900-1950', *Past and Present*, 203, pp. 181-204.

³ See for example Sally Alexander (2000), 'Men's Fears and Women's Work: Responses to Unemployment in London Between the Wars', *Gender and History*, 12 (2), pp. 401-425.

⁴ Matthew Thomson (2013), *Lost Freedom: The Landscape of the Child and the British Post-War Settlement* (Oxford University Press), p. 13. Here he is of course invoking Raymond Williams.

⁵ Here I follow Jan Plamper in using 'feeling' as a synonym for emotion. Jan Plamper (2015), *The History of Emotions: an introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press). This is certainly how the two terms were deployed contemporaneously.

⁶ Amy Bell (2009), 'Landscapes of Fear: Wartime London, 1939-1945', *Journal of British Studies*, 48 (1), pp. 153-175.

⁷ Lyrics from the song 'We'll Meet Again' (Ross Parker and Hughie Charles, 1939).

⁸ For a discussion of stoicism and heroism in women's memories of the war see Penny Summerfield (1998), *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives: discourse and subjectivity in oral histories of the Second World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press).

⁹ William Crofts (1986), 'The Attlee Government's Pursuit of Women', *History Today*, 36 (8), pp. 29-35.

¹⁰ *Picture Post*, 26 July 1947, p. 5. See also *Picture Post*, 23 August 1947, p. 5.

¹¹ <http://www.britishpathe.com/video/domestic-workers-required-in-hospitals> (1946); <http://www.britishpathe.com/video/trailer-teaching> (1948); <http://www.britishpathe.com/video/women-must-work/query/advertising> (1947). On the shortage of nurses see 'Will the nurse get a new deal at last?' *Picture Post*, 27 September 1947, pp. 8-9.

¹² Denise Riley (1983), *War in the Nursery: theories of the child and mother* (London: Virago).

¹³ Wendy Webster (1998), *Imagining Home: gender, 'race' and national identity, 1945-64*, (London: UCL Press), p. xii.

¹⁴ *Wall Street Journal* quoted in Sara Horrell (2007), 'The Household and the Labour Market', in Crafts, Gazeley and Newell (Eds.), *Work and Pay in Twentieth Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press). For comparison, the figures were 10% in 1911 and 71% in 1990. Horrell, 'The Household', p. 118.

¹⁵ Alva Myrdal and Viola Klein (1956), *Women's Two Roles. Home and Work*. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd.). The double burden was not, of course, an invention of the mid-twentieth century.

¹⁶ Arthur McIvor (2013), *Working Lives. Work in Britain since 1945* (London: Palgrave), p. 75.

¹⁷ Joanna Bourke (2006), *Fear. A Cultural History*, (London: Virago); Simon May (2011), *Love. A History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press); Barbara Rosenwein (1998), *Anger's Past: the social uses of an emotion in the middle ages* (New York: Cornell University Press).

¹⁸ Barbara H. Rosenwein (2006), *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), p. 2.

¹⁹ Benno Gammerl (2012), 'Emotional Styles – Concepts and Challenges', *Rethinking History: the journal of theory and practice*, 16 (2), p. 164.

²⁰ Arlie Russell Hochschild (1983, 2012), *The Managed Heart: commercialization of human feeling* (Berkeley: University of California Press).

²¹ Hochschild, *The Managed Heart*, p. 7.

²² Hochschild, *The Managed Heart*, p. 147.

²³ Stephen Brooke (2001), 'Gender and Working Class Identity in Britain during the 1950s', *Journal of Social History*, 34 (4), pp. 773-795, p. 774.

²⁴ Claire Langhamer (2012), 'The live dynamic whole of feeling and behaviour': capitshment and the politics of emotion, 1945-1957', *Journal of British Studies*, 51 (2) pp. 416-441; Adrian Bingham (2009), *Family Newspapers? Sex, private life and the British popular press 1918-1978* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 97; Nikolas Rose (1996), *Inventing Ourselves: psychology, power and personhood* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) and (1999) *Governing the Soul: the shaping of the private self* (London: Routledge). See also Mathew Thomson (2006), *Psychological Subjects: identity, culture and health in twentieth-century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

²⁵ *Everywoman*, October 1959, p. 17.

²⁶ On post-war social science see Mike Savage (2011), *Identities and Social Change in Britain since 1940: The politics of method* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

²⁷ For a history of Mass Observation see James Hinton (2013), *The Mass Observers: a history, 1937-1949* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

²⁸ MOA, directive, January 1944.

²⁹ Mass Observation Project (hereafter MOP), directive for summer 1983. The broadcaster hoped the responses would help in planning a series with the provisional title, 'Will we work tomorrow?'

³⁰ MOP, directive, summer 1997.

³¹ On working with Mass Observation see Annebella Pollen (2013), 'Research Methodology in Mass Observation Past and Present: 'Scientifically, about as valuable as a chimpanzee's tea party at the zoo'', *History Workshop Journal*, 75 (1), pp. 213-235.

³² John Bowlby (1953), *Child Care and the Growth of Love*, (London: Penguin).

³³ Myrdal and Klein, *Women's Two Roles*, p.154.

³⁴ Judith Hubback (1957), *Wives Who Went to College* (London: William Heinemann Ltd.), p.159.

³⁵ McIvor, *Working Lives*, p. 24.

³⁶ Dolly Smith Wilson (2006), 'A New Look at the affluent Worker: the good working mother in post-war Britain', *Twentieth Century British History*, 17 (2), pp. 206-229.

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- ³⁷ Ferdynand Zweig (1952), *Women's Life and Labour* (London: Victor Gollancz), p. 170.
- ³⁸ Zweig, *Women's Life and Labour*, p. 32.
- ³⁹ Zweig, *Women's Life and Labour*, p. 179.
- ⁴⁰ Viola Klein (1957), *Working Wives. A Study of Facts and Opinions Concerning the Gainful Employment of Married Women in Britain* (London: Institute of Personnel Management), pp. 55-56.
- ⁴¹ Leonora Eyles (1947), *Unmarried but Happy* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd.), p. 41.
- ⁴² Eyles, *Unmarried but Happy*, p. 41.
- ⁴³ Eyles, *Unmarried but Happy*, p. 43.
- ⁴⁴ MOA, directive, October/November 1947, DR 2254: woman born in 1901.
- ⁴⁵ On the politics of postwar housewifery see James Hinton (1994), 'Militant Housewives: the British Housewives' League and the Attlee Government', *History Workshop Journal*, 38 (1), pp. 129-156.
- ⁴⁶ MOA, directive, October/November 1947, DR 3116: woman born in 1900.
- ⁴⁷ MOA, directive, October/November 1947, DR 1635: woman born in 1915.
- ⁴⁸ MOA, directive, October/November 1947, DR 4166: woman (date of birth not given).
- ⁴⁹ MOA, directive, October/November 1947, DR 4293: woman (date of birth not given).
- ⁵⁰ MOA, directive, October/November 1947, DR 3576: woman born in 1911.
- ⁵¹ MOA, directive, October/November 1947, DR 1570: woman (date of birth not given).
- ⁵² See Penny Summerfield (2004), 'Culture and Composure: creating narratives of the gendered self in oral history interviews', *Cultural and Social History*, 1 (1), pp. 65-93.
- ⁵³ MOP, directive, summer 1983, DR D167: woman born in 1915.
- ⁵⁴ MOP, directive, summer 1983, DR D167: woman born in 1915.
- ⁵⁵ MOP, directive, summer 1997, DR A1733: woman born in 1928.
- ⁵⁶ See Michal Shapira (2013), *The War Within: psychoanalysis, total war, and the making of the democratic self in postwar Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 112-137.
- ⁵⁷ On fatherhood see Laura King (2015), *Family Men: fatherhood and masculinity in Britain, 1914-1960* (Oxford: Oxford University Press); Julie-Marie Strange (2015), *Fatherhood and the British Working Class, 1865-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- ⁵⁸ MOP, directive, summer 1983, DR A8: woman born in 1929.
- ⁵⁹ MOP, directive, summer 1983, DR C138: woman born in 1944. On stress and 'nerves' at work see Jill Kirby (2014), 'Troubled by Life: the experience of stress in twentieth-century Britain', Sussex PhD.
- ⁶⁰ MOP, directive, summer 1983, DR G226: woman born in 1941.
- ⁶¹ Zweig, *Women's Life and Labour*, p. 170.
- ⁶² MOP, directive, summer 1997, DR B2611: woman born in 1927.
- ⁶³ Hubback, *Wives Who Went to College*, p. 47.
- ⁶⁴ MOA, directive, October/November 1947, DR 3545: woman born in 1917.
- ⁶⁵ Daily Mail, 21 July 1954, p. 4.
- ⁶⁶ Daily Mail, 25 April 1955, p. 6.
- ⁶⁷ Michael Roper (1994), *Masculinity and the British Organization Man since 1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- ⁶⁸ *Woman's Realm*, 4 July 1959, p. 77.
- ⁶⁹ *Woman's Realm*, 12 December 1959, p. 48.
- ⁷⁰ *Woman's Illustrated*, 23 August 1952, p. 21.
- ⁷¹ Homechat, 10 November 1951, p. 46.
- ⁷² Daily Mirror, 30 June 1955, pp. 10-11.
- ⁷³ Rosalie Silverstone (1976), 'Office Work for Women: an historical review', *Business History*, 18 (1), pp. 98-110, 109.
- ⁷⁴ Rosemary Pringle (1998), *Secretaries Talk: Sexuality, power and work* (London: Verso). Domestic service remained, however, an important area of work for migrant women, first through the European Volunteer Worker schemes in the late 1940s and later via the commercial agencies which provided workers for private homes. Gerry Holloway (2005), *Women and Work in Britain since 1840* (London: Routledge), pp. 204-205.
- ⁷⁵ Daily Mirror, 26 January 1952, p. 2.
- ⁷⁶ *Woman and Home*, November 1954, p. 41.
- ⁷⁷ MOP, directive, summer 1997, DR G1041: woman born in 1925.
- ⁷⁸ MOP, directive, summer 1997, DR N1592: woman born in 1931.
- ⁷⁹ Daily Mirror, 3 April, 1957, p. 11.
- ⁸⁰ Quoted in Louise A. Jackson (2006), *Women Police: gender, welfare and surveillance in the twentieth century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press), p. 1.

⁸¹ Zweig, *Women's Life and Labour*, pp. 87-88.

⁸² Nancy Seear, Veronica Roberts, John Brock (1964), *A Career for Women in Industry?* (London: Oliver and Boyd Ltd.), p. 92.

⁸³ Zweig, *Women's Life and Labour*, p. 91.

⁸⁴ Zweig, *Women's Life and Labour*, p. 92.

⁸⁵ H. E. Dale (1941), *The Higher Civil Service of Great Britain* (London: Oxford University Press), p. 126.

⁸⁶ Referring to Dale's description Hochschild argues that: 'Working women are to working men as junior clerks are to permanent secretaries. Between executive and secretary, doctor and nurse, psychiatrist and social worker; dentist and dental assistant, a power difference is reflected as a gender difference. The 'doctrine of feelings' is another double standard between the two sexes.' Hochschild, *The Managed Heart*, p. 172.